DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 865 HE 017 588

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TITLE Research Funding for Faculty at Undergraduate Institutions.
PUB DATE May 84
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (Chicago, IL, May 3-5, 1984).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; Eligibility; *Federal Aid; Federal Programs; Grants; *Grantsmanship; Higher Education; Information Seeking; Information Sources; *Private Financial Support; *Program Proposals; Proposal Writing; *Research Projects; Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS Research in Undergraduate Institutions Program; Small College Faculty Research Opportunity Award; Small Grant Program

ABSTRACT

Sources of research funds for undergraduate faculty and ways to secure the funds are discussed. Information on three federal grant programs is provided, along with advice for obtaining funds from foundations and corporations, including techniques for gathering information on prospective funding sources. Suggestions on the process of preparing grant applications are included. Three federal sources of funds are described: the Small Grant Program of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA); the Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) program of the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Small College Faculty Research Opportunity Award of NSF. The Small Grant Program, which provides 1-year, nonrenewable grants for up to $15,000 in direct costs, is designed for newer, less experienced investigators, those at small colleges, and others without regular research grant support or resources. The RUI program replaces and incorporates the former 2- and 4-year college instrumentation program and also covers the standard project grant. The Small College Faculty Research Opportunity Award allows faculty from an undergraduate department to participate in the research program of an investigator with an NSF grant at a research institution. Additional features and eligibility criteria are covered. (SW)

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Research Funding for Faculty At Undergraduate Institutions

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Presented at Midwestern Psychological Association Meetings, Chicago, 1984

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Research Funding for Faculty at Undergraduate Institutions

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Abstract

Obtaining funding for research is difficult for faculty at undergraduate institutions, but there are programs in which they can compete with each other rather than with graduate faculty. This paper discusses the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration Small Grant Program, the National Science Foundation's Research in Undergraduate Institutions program, and NSF's Small College Faculty Research Opportunity Awards. It also discusses seeking funds from foundations and corporations. It describes techniques for gathering information on prospective funding sources. Finally, it offers suggestions on the process of preparing grant applications.

Be realistic: it's hard to get grants. It's never been easy, but recently it's gotten even tougher, with more people competing for relatively fewer dollars. Even faculty in graduate programs at big-name schools have found it harder to get grants in the last 5 years. And the situation is tougher still for faculty at undergraduate institutions. But that's not news to most of you. If you've been looking for funding for very long at all, you probably no longer harbor illusions and false hopes about the grant money rolling in.

I am here to offer some realistic hope about funding. There are, in fact, grant programs in which faculty at undergraduate institutions can compete successfully. I emphasize the word compete; there are no guarantees. You still have to have a well-written proposal, based on a good idea, to have a chance to get funded. But at least in these programs you compete against others in similar circumstances, rather than against faculty in big-name, graduate institutions.

Let me review three sources of funds for undergraduate faculty, and then briefly discuss how to pursue them.

The Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) Small Grant Program provides one-year, nonrenewable grants for up to $15,000 in direct costs. According to the guidelines, they are intended for "newer, less experienced investigators, those at small colleges, and others who do not have regular research grant support or resources available from their institutions." They can be used for exploratory and pilot studies, the development of new methodology, and the analysis of previously-collected data, as well as for conventional research projects. All types of costs may be included e.g., salary, equipment, supplies and expense, travel.

Proposals should be for research projects relevant to the interests of the three ADAMHA institutes: National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute

on Drug Abuse, and National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. These interests are relatively broad and encompass much of psychology. However, a recent policy statement specifically excludes research on the social determinants of mental health and drug and alcohol abuse problems. This seems in keeping with the Reagan administration's basic antipathy toward social and behavioral research. If you have doubts about whether a prospective project falls within the areas of interest of these programs, you should contact the staff of the Small Grants Program at NIMH, which coordinates the small grants program for the other institutes as well. Their address and telephone appear at the end of this paper.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has two programs that are especially relevant to faculty at undergraduate colleges.

The Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) program is new. It replaces and incorporates the former 2-and 4-year college instrumentation program. The RUI program offers research support for faculty at "primarily undergraduate" institutions. To be eligible, you must be in a department that does not offer a doctorate (a master's is permissible), and at an institution that awarded no more than 20 doctorates in all fields in the past 2 years. Proposals are evaluated according to the usual criteria of competence of the investigator, intrinsic merit, and utility and relevance. In addition, emphasis is given to the probable impact on the research environment of the investigator's department. Of particular interest is the preparation of students for doctoral education and scientific careers. Impact can be addressed in any or all of three ways: (1) direct student involvement in research; (2) improved student preparation due to greater faculty involvement in mainstream research; and (3) improved faculty/student research opportunities through the acquisition of research instrumentation.

Proposals may be submitted in two categories: research awards and research instrumentation awards. The first is essentially the same as a standard project

grant, in that it may include all categories of allowable costs, i.e., salary, supplies and expense, equipment, travel, etc. It is possible to submit a proposal in this category to conduct research at an institution other than the home campus.

Research instrumentation awards cover only the costs of acquiring equipment for research. Proposals must explain why the equipment is essential and is not available elsewhere for "use on a reasonable basis." A proposal may consist of separate projects by several investigators who plan to share the equipment. In such a case, the merits of all proposed projects are considered in making funding decisions.

Applications to the RUI program follow the standard NSF format and are handled by the individual NSF divisions, which have earmarked funds for the program. The relevant division for most psychological research is the Division of Behavioral and Neural Sciences. Information and guidelines on the program can be obtained from the staff of that division, or from the RUI coordinator at NSF. The address and telephone number are given at the end of this paper.

The second NSF program of interest is the Small College Faculty Research Opportunity Award. This program makes it possible for a faculty member from an undergraduate department to participate in the research program of an investigator with an NSF grant at a research institution. A person who wishes to participate in this program must make arrangements with the host investigator and institution. Then the host arranges with NSF for the necessary budget changes in his or her grant. Note that the visiting person does not submit an application directly to NSF. Although no funds are earmarked for this program, NSF states that "it has always been possible for Foundation grantees to make arrangements for the participation of small-college faculty in Foundation research grants, . . . each case is judged on its own research merits."

The recent cutbacks in federal support have prompted many university researchers

to turn to private foundations and corporations for funding. Small college faculty should also consider approaching these potential sources. It is important to realize, however, that there are some substantial differences between these sponsors and traditional federal government programs.

The first of these differences is in the amount of support available. The private sector has not in the past, and will not in the foreseeable future, allocate nearly the amounts of money to research that the federal government has. According to The Foundation Grants Index, 12th Ed., in 1982, the 444 foundations reporting gave $143.2 million for the support of research of all types. A separate figure for psychology was not given, but it is safe to say it was a relatively small fraction of that total by comparison with support for research in health and physical sciences. In contrast, in fiscal year 1983, NSF's programs in cognitive and behavioral science were funded at about $6.6 million and NIMH's budget for research was about $107 million. A clear implication of these figures is that those seeking funds from private sources can generally expect smaller awards than the traditional federal research grants. Of course, this does not necessarily present a problem for faculty at small, undergraduate colleges.

The second major difference between private and federal programs is in the breadth of their program interests. In general, federal programs tend to be broader in scope than private ones. To some extent this follows from the relatively limited funds available to most private agencies. They prefer to focus their efforts on a few topics because they perceive that they get more for their money by doing so. For the same reason, they often prefer to fund projects that have relatively high visibility. Thus they often prefer to fund projects that offer the promise of contributing to the solution of the problems they regard as especially significant. They are often less likely to support basic research

and more likely to go for applied research and demonstration projects.

There is another sense in which the focus of private funding sources is often narrower than that of the federal government. Many place restrictions on the type and/or on the location of institutions to which they give grants. The most common restriction on type is to give grants only to private institutions. This is good or bad, depending, of course, on whether you are at a public or private college. The most common restriction on location is to confine grants to institutions in the same geographic region as the foundation or corporation. Note that many corporations include any areas in which they have operations.

There are two clear implications of these general characteristics of private funding sources. The first and most important is that it is absolutely imperative to investigate these sources before you submit any applications. Find out what their current program interests are and what kinds of projects they have recently funded. Make direct contact with staff members, discuss your project, and get feedback as to whether it falls within their areas of interest. Also, find out what their institutional and geographic restrictions are. In the long run, you will save time and effort by only submitting formal applications to those sources with a real interest in your project.

The second implication is that you may need to redefine the emphasis of your project, depending upon the interests of the funding source you are approaching. This is not a matter of altering the actual content of the project. Rather, it is a question of how you present it, especially its potential implications. The same project on, for example, cognitive development, would be presented very differently to a foundation with a strong interest in education than to one with an emphasis on child welfare, yet both presentations would be valid.

I have emphasized the importance of getting information about prospective

grantors. Let me now discuss some of the primary places to look for this information. The ideal situation is to have a campus research office, staffed by someone who can discuss your project with you, locate potential funding sources, and provide you with general information on each source. If your campus does not have a research office you should consider urging your administration to establish one. On a small campus, an office can be staffed on a part-time basis, as it is on my campus, and still function effectively. In the long run, the money spent on such an office can pay off in the form of grants for the campus.

If you do find yourself having to do your own research on funding sources, here are some of the best places to look. Most college, and many public, libraries have at least some of these publications.

Two broad-spectrum reference books on grants of all kinds are the Annual Register of Grant Support and The Grants Register. Both have good indexes to allow you to locate entries that are relevant to your project. The entries are fairly brief, but give enough information for you to determine if you should contact the agency for more detailed data. For psychology projects, the Annual Register is probably the more complete and up-to-date of the two books.

The two major sources of general information on federal programs are the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance and the Federal Register. The CFDA has relatively brief descriptions of all federal grant programs, indexed in several ways, including agency, function, and subject. It is issued once per year. For more up-to-date information on programs and policy developments, the Federal Register is the place to go. It is published daily, and contains all the notices issued by all federal agencies that day. It is organized by agency, so you need to know which agencies have programs relevant to your interests in order to use it.

The best way to get detailed information on a specific federal program is to contact the program staff directly. All programs have written guidelines which

they will send on request. In addition, it can be very helpful to contact the staff by letter or telephone to describe the nature and scope of your project and find out the extent to which it falls within the guidelines of their program. You may also find it necessary to contact program staffers during preparation of an application, as more specific questions arise. In my experience, federal program officers are knowledgeable, cooperative, and helpful.

There are a number of sources of information on foundations and corporations. Some of the most useful are The Foundation Directory, Foundation Grants Index, Foundation Grants to Individuals, Source Book Profiles, Corporate Foundation Profiles, Directory of Corporate Philanthrophy, and Taft Corporate Directory.

A final source of information is the APA Research Support network. They are especially good at providing up-to-date information on federal program budgets and policy issues through periodic mailing to their members. APA membership is not required to belong to the support network. Their address and telephone appear at the end of this paper.

Once you have identified the best prospective funding sources, you are ready to write formal applications. Let me briefly discuss some of the most salient points to keep in mind during this process.

First, be sure to follow all the guidelines of the program to which you are applying. Although most agencies ask for the same kinds of information, they often want very different formats. Give it to them the way they want it, whether or not it seems to you like the best way to do things. Don't provide them any nonsubstantive reason to reject your proposal.

Know your audience, and write to it. Try to find out who will review your proposal. Federal program officers will send you a list of the members of their study sections, on request. Foundations won't necessarily do so, but may if you ask them. Sometimes their reviewers are identified in literature such as their

annual reports. In any case, identify the reviewers who are most expert in the area of your proposal and to some degree tailor the proposal to them. At the very least, be sure to cite their work that's relevant.

It is likely that no more than one or two reviewers on a panel will truly be experts in your area. The others, in essence, will be educated, intelligent, laypersons. Therefore, write with a minimum of esoteric jargon. This is especially important when you explain the rationale for your project and the implications of it. It is helpful, if you have time, to have a nonexpert colleague review your proposal for clarity.

Tailor your proposal not only to the expertise of the reviewers but also to the interests of the agency. This is expecially important when applying to foundations and corporations, whose program interests are usually rather narrow. This consideration primarily comes into play in the statements of the problem you are addressing and of the possible implications of the project. You may have to rewrite these parts of your proposal extensively each time you apply to another funding source. Nevertheless, the more ways that you can legitimately construe the scope and emphasis of your project, the greater the number and variety of funding sources you can approach, and the more opportunities for success you will have.

When you put together your budget, be realistic. Don't make extravagant requests, but don't be afraid to ask for expensive items that you really need to carry out the work. Don't forget about inflation when figuring the costs of items; a year may well pass between constructing the budget and spending the money. Finally, be sure that somewhere in the application, you justify each budget item in terms of its contribution to the success of the project.

Finally, don't hesitate to stay in touch with program staffers during the preparation of your proposal. When you have a question about the proposal

guidelines, or budgetary restrictions, or whatever, call and ask.

I doubt that it will ever be easy for faculty at undergraduate institutions to get research grants. There are, however, some funding sources for which the chances of success are greater than for others. The money will go to those who have sound ideas, who have identified the most likely funding sources, and who have written clear, well-tailored proposals. I hope this paper has given you a good start on the last two of these requirements. The rest is up to you.

Appendix

Small Grants Program
National Institute of Mental Health
5600 Fishers Lane,
Parklawn Building, Room 10-104
Rockville, MD 20857
(301-443-4347)

RUI Coordinator
National Science Foundation
Washington, D.C. 20550
(202-357-7456)

Director,
Division of Behavioral and Neural Sciences
NSF
Washington, D.C. 20550
(202-357-7564)

APA Research Support Network
1200 17th Street, N.W.
Room 304
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202-833-7612)